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ABSTRACT

The need for modification of teacher behavior in teaching the Mexican American occurs primarily in 2 areas. First, the teacher must seek ways to improve her teaching by learning how to plan for, produce, and evaluate behavioral changes in her pupils. Writing instructional objectives in behavioral terms, learning ways to assess the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal interaction, and understanding the use of positive reinforcement can all contribute greatly to changes in how the teacher approaches the teaching task. The second aspect of teacher behavior is concerned with knowledge about the culture that the Mexican American child brings to school. It is understood that the knowledge itself will not produce changes in attitudes and expectations about the pupils. However, accurate information which the teacher can use as she observes pupil behavior can often be the key as to whether she will show sensitivity, appreciation, or a positive attitude. Modification of these 2 aspects of teacher behavior is a necessity if Mexican American pupils are to benefit to the fullest from an educational system that has failed them in the past. It is not unreasonable to ask that change take place to make teachers more effective in the classroom and that this effectiveness in pedagogy be enhanced by knowledge of the culture of the Mexican American. (JH)

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MODIFICATION OF TEACHER BEHAVIOR IN TEACHING THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN

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MODIFICATION OF TEACHER BEHAVIOR IN TEACHING THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN

How do you teach Mexican-Americans? This question has been asked with increased frequency in schools and communities throughout the southwest. The reasons for asking the question may stem from the pressure being exerted on schools by increased activism of Mexican-American groups who have placed the burden on the school to explain and solve the educational deficiencies of Mexican-American pupils. It could also be the result of pangs of conscience that surely should affect educators who consider drop-out rates, low achievement, and low levels of aspiration among their Mexican-American students. Regardless of reasons for the frequency of the question, it has generated activity in local school districts and colleges in efforts to help teachers and administrators to work more effectively with their students.

Teachers come to classes and workshops eager to learn but ill-prepared to do so. They come with the assumption that there is something wrong with the students that needs to be changed. Operating on this premise, teachers may look for the "tried and true ways" for teaching Mexican-American children and youth. If the workshop leader or the professor has a Spanish surname he is expected to have the

answers on how to work with them. The search for the quick answer, for the tricks of the trade, reinforce the notion that these students learn differently and that new ways to teach them have to be found. Teachers enrolled in courses that deal with the Mexican-American demonstrate this limited view of the problem and are often disillusioned because someone can't give them answers.

Who has the Problem?

Students who enter the school and meet the teacher's preconceived ideas of what they should like, i.e. meet the "entrance requirements" of the predominantly middle-class oriented schools and teachers, do relatively well in going through the school program. Indeed, if the students come to school well prepared to cope with the pre-set curriculum as a result of their experiences which match the school expectations, teachers see themselves as having problems meeting the needs of the students who obviously need to be challenged. However, if the student is culturally different and lacks the experiential background which the school accepts and which is a prerequisite for success, the student is seen as having problems. The burden is therefore placed on the student to get rid of his problems or languish in some form of guilt for not being able to learn. The frequent lament is that these children are not motivated or just simply don't care. An important change that must take place is that the teacher must see the needs of these

learners as her problems and must then proceed to modify her teaching behavior and attitudes to assure successes of her pupils.

I would like to approach the problem of necessary modification of teaching behavior from two broad aspects, which are in turn, based on the assumption that teachers who are ineffective in teaching Mexican-American children are ignorant. The two aspects of the ignorance are (1) lack of sophistication in planning and carrying out effective teaching strategies and (2) lack of knowledge and understanding about the culture that children bring to school.

It has been said on many occasions that the school must adjust to the needs of the child in order to provide him with the best education. Change in the school cannot be some impersonal rearrangement of schedules or a different mode of organization but rather it must be, first of all, in the modification of teacher behavior.

If teachers were placed arbitrarily in three categories, the first might contain the person who relates well to all children. She has their interests at heart, and makes every child feel successful in his own right. On the other extreme we would find the person who teaches from a racist point of view because she believes that Mexican-American children just can't achieve like "normal" children. Her attitude might be a patronizing one, but beneath the surface there is a biased attitude. There is not much that can be

done to change people who have deep-seeded negative feelings about others except to try to get them out of the teaching profession. Between these two extremes is a large group of teachers who are ready for change. They will attempt new ways to interest their students and could probably be found attending workshops and classes that deal with the teaching of Mexican-American children. Their progress has been slow largely because of the content of such workshops and classes. They often consist of a combination of courses in sociology, history, Spanish, art, music and what ever else can be thrown in. While such content is important in learning about the Mexican-American culture, the teacher who is interested in improving her effectiveness can find little immediate application toward solving the problems she faces. When she asks questions about the kinds of things she should do to teach her youngsters more effectively she might be told to "build up their self-image" or raise their level of "self-esteem." While no one would quarrel with such pronouncements, they are illusive because it is difficult to reduce them to specific behaviors that the teacher can observe. What behavior that the child demonstrates tells the teacher that he has a bad self-image? How will he act differently when his self-image is improved? Until we can have people addressing themselves to observation of changes in behavior, we will continue to provide little help in increasing teacher effectiveness. Recently, in a class on

Teaching the Mexican-American, a student exploded in disgust exclaiming, "I took this class to find out what you do to Chicano students to get them on the ball! I don't want to spend my time talking about teaching strategies and ways of assessing results. All we're doing here is talking about good educational methods!" This teacher's ignorance of the problem he has is typical of the situation. Mexican-American students require good teaching that will result in a good education. They are not so different that we have to invent patent methods and techniques that are exclusively for them. Later in this paper I will discuss the differences in culture that the child brings to school and which the teacher must understand if her good teaching techniques and methods are to be effective.

Modification of Teaching Behavior

The stereotype role of the teacher in our educational system is of the person who presents lessons, gives information and arranges activities in which students participate to varying degrees. Typical lesson plans that are considered good, describe teacher behavior explicitly. The teacher tells how she is going to present the lesson, how she will use a certain activity sheet, and when the class will break up into smaller groups. In observing such a lesson a visitor might react very favorable to this well-organized creature who executed the lesson perfectly. If this same teacher happens to have some students who are docile and participate

little in the lessons, the excellence of teacher performance will mean little to the enhancement of their learning. Accountability for what happens in the classrooms should not be considered in terms of teacher performance but rather in the change that good teaching affects in the learner. Teachers have to decide, through careful analysis, the particular needs of their students. After this fact is determined, then the question of how the needs will be met becomes pertinent. Teacher behavior must be modified to focus on student behavior as the criterion for deciding what to teach.

Behavioral Objectives

Recently there has been increased interest in behavioral or performance objectives for instruction. Such objectives first received wide exposure with the advent of programmed instruction in the late fifties and early sixties. In deciding what a program was to teach, the programmer stated objectives that clearly defined what the student would be able to do to demonstrate that he had learned. Behavioral objectives can be stated quite simply by answering the following questions in regard to any learning task: What do I want the student to be able to do? How am I going to get him there? How will I know if he has arrived? Having to answer these questions places the teacher in a demanding situation for it is not enough to say that the child will "understand" or will "learn about..." It is imperative

that the act that the child will perform to demonstrate "understanding" or "learning" be stated unambiguously. It is relatively simple to write behavioral objectives to tasks in arithmetic, reading, or spelling. What can be done when a teacher states that an objective in her class is to improve the self-image of her students? First of all, what tells the teacher that her students have a bad self-image? It must be something behavioral in nature otherwise she couldn't observe it. This is a good starting point because now the teacher knows what the student does. The next step is to determine what he should be like when his self-image improves, and proceed to arrange an environment and plan lessons where that kind of behavior can be taught.

Terms such as self-image and readiness have been used as convenient "catch-alls" to protect the ineffectiveness of the school. If a teacher is forced into defining and describing a "bad self-image" and comes up with behavior such as "the child doesn't try anything on his own," then it should be clear that we are dealing with "not trying" behavior and should then plan for opportunities for the child to <u>learn</u> to try! Similarly, the educational use of the readiness concept has excused poor teaching. How does a teacher know that a child isn't ready? Pressed for an answer she would again come up with a description of behavior. "He can't distinguish between b and h, and c and e." Barring any physical problem, the child can be <u>taught</u> these dis-

criminations. We aren't dealing with "readiness" but with "inability to distinguish between b and h, and c and e." The latter is an observable need, "readiness" in not. The importance of instruction based on behavioral objectives for the Mexican-American child is evident. He is so often lumped into descriptive generalities which cloud his needs rather than identify them.

The education statement of "taking a child where he is" becomes more than a cliché when teachers interpret entering behavior in terms of what the child can do at that point and plan for changes accordingly. Too often children have been treated in regard to where they should be rather than where they are in their development. The culturally different child who comes to school with a different set of experiences and doesn't fit the pattern of what a child of his age and grade level should be like, will find himself being forced into a preconceived mold that is a figment of teacher imagination, school policy, or just ignorance. His experiential or learning gaps are often attributed to inattention, lack of motivation, or a myriad of other factors which serve only to excuse the school for the inept job being done. By determining the entering behavior of the learner in any area of instruction, the teacher can plan for certain changes to occur as a result of specific behavioral objectives, relevant teaching, and effective evaluation procedures.

Change in Teaching Strategies

Schools and teachers continue to be basically punitive in nature. Grades are a sort of punishment, teacher attitude regarding class control is often punitive, and middle-class parents' admonishments regarding school are often couched in such terms as "they'll make you mind." The whole conditioning process has produced situations in which teachers look for "good" behavior and devise many ways to suppress that behavior which is "unacceptable." The Mexican-American child who has been taught to respect authority can become a very passive, unmotivated learner under such conditions. Teachers then complain that Mexican-American youngsters don't speak out, it's difficult to get them involved, and they just aren't verbal when the subject is academic. The last decade has seen the development of various techniques for analyzing teacher effectiveness. One of these is the Flander's Verbal Interaction Analysis[1] which serves to determine the direct or non-direct influence that the teacher exerts on the learner. By analyzing her verbal interaction with pupils, the teacher can find out if the questions she asks, and the responses she makes tend to set a climate where children can become active learners or merely listeners. Most teachers are surprised when they study a matirx on which the amount and type of interaction that occurs in their classrooms in a given twenty minute period is plotted. Teaching behavior can be modified when it is readily seen

that the teacher is talking too much, asking ambiguous questions, giving unclear directions, and failing to reinforce correct or partially correct responses. The Mexican-American child needs every opportunity to become involved in an educational system that often seems like an alien environment to him. Teachers need to employ strategies that elicit responses from the students rather than assuming that they are not motivated.

A parallel system that can also be of help in changing teacher behavior is the Galloway Non-Verbal Interaction Analysis.[2] This system can be integrated with the Flander's Verbal Interaction Analysis to give the teacher feedback about her non-verbal communication which is often subtle or sub-conscious. An added difficulty might be that certain non-verbal mannerism can mean something quite different to the child who comes to school with different cultural influences.

Behavior Modification

Recently, the educational scene has witnessed the use of behavior modification methods, particularly in teaching emotionally disturbed children or those with severe learning problems. These methods have much wider application and can serve to train the teacher-technologist to become skilled in observing pupil behavior and in arranging an environment in which relevant responses will be made by the pupil and reinforced by the teacher. Teachers have used the term

reinforce in ways which implied repetition or further exposure. In the modification techniques it is used in a behavioristic context in which a reinforcer is a stimulus which will strengthen a response. Something happens to the learner which causes certain responses to be learned and made again in the presence of similar stimulus conditions because these responses have been reinforced. Teacher behavior can be modified to become more effective through training in behavior modification techniques. Teachers need to modify their own teaching behavior to include knowledge and use of positive reinforcement in shaping of student behavior. It is not sufficient to expose the Mexican-American child to the things he needs to learn and hope that he will. The teacher must understand how learning takes place and plan for it to occur.

Modification of teacher behavior is imperative if the Mexican-American child is to receive a meaningful education. Teaching strategies, development of behavioral objectives for instruction, analysis of verbal interaction and understanding contingencies of reinforcement are all relatively simple to learn. To teach a teacher to be an effective technologist is a function that is largely cognitive in nature. Ignorance of effective ways of teaching can be corrected by teaching teachers how to achieve success in new ways.

An equally important factor deals with ignorance of the culture that the child brings to school. While some of

the information, facts, and statistics that the teacher can learn about the culture are also cognitive in nature, the feelings and attitudes about other people can best be described as affective. Teachers can be helped to feel more positively about Mexican-American children if they are exposed to information that will contribute to a change in attitudes.

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Rosenthal and Jacobson[3] point out that attitudes about Mexican-American learners can determine how well they will do in school. If teachers feel that these children don't do as well as others their feelings are indeed justified by poor performance. Teachers who feel this way out of ignorance and not racism develop their attitude from past performance, achievement scores and intelligence scores of Mexican-American children. Anyone placing trust on these sources would have to arrive at the same conclusion; however, a more astute observer would raise questions about test bias, language differences and other factors which work against the Mexican-American pupil and result in categorizing him as a slow learner. The end result of testing programs is too often a system of sorting children into categories which affect their future placement and which in fact predict whether success is forthcoming or not. Using unfair tests, unfair grouping practices and negative attitudes results in going from unfounded assumptions to foregone conclusions

about the success of the Mexican-American child.

Understanding Cultural Differences

It is essential that those who are concerned about the need for change in teacher behavior as it relates to attitudes about the culture that children bring to school, speak clearly in specific operational terms and not in generalities. It is well and good to speak of Mexican-American "heritage" and of Mexican-American "values" and "culture patterns," but to leave such expressions to the biased connotations ascribed to them by the ignorant is to confuse the issue rather than to provide the basis for change in attitudes or expectations. Anglo teachers become frustrated and receive little value from a repeated bombardment of rhetoric which denounces their lack of understanding of values and culture patterns while at the same time receiving little help as to specifics that will help them out of their ignorance. It is incumbent upon the Mexican-American who wishes to educate Anglo teachers, to give them clear and precise information about their Mexican-American students in regard to cultural differences that the school has not previously respected nor accomodated.

One of the most concrete examples of the cultural difference that the Mexican-American child brings to school is his language. The teacher must learn first of all to accept this difference as an asset rather than a liability. How often do we hear that the Mexican-American has difficulty

learning to read in English because he is "bilingual?" If the proper attitude is held by the teacher, the child can develop the attitudes that his language is an equally effective system through which one learns. Even when the child brings a non-standard Spanish to the classroom, his language must not be regarded as wrong or bad but merely different. He can feel that his non-standard Spanish is important in the context of its use. He can learn Standard Spanish in a good bilingual program of instruction. Mexican-American children have been forced to develop feelings that what they bring to school in cultural patterns, and in essence who they are, is really not acceptable in the American Public School.

The insensitive teacher whose cultural blinders limit her vision as to what constitutes a good breakfast might insist during a health lesson that children draw pictures of their breakfasts in terms of acceptable components. These components would of course be included in health and nutrition books and would consist of such things as cereals, toast, juice, eggs and milk. What does this say to the child who enjoys, in addition to some of the above, such things as tortillas, chorizo, chocolate, cafe de leche, and even menudo as common fare? Is he having something less than an acceptable breakfast as seen through narrow cultural bias?

The child who brings to school and shares the excitement of a typical Mexican-American wedding, might

paint a picture of the wedding party cars festooned with flowers. How does the teacher react? Does she see it as a quaint custom of people who aren't "with it?" Does she see more worth in a string of noisy tin cans and old shoes or does she give the child and others who are not Mexican-American a feeling that she understands and respects diversity in culture?

When the child draws a picture of his family does the teacher become confused because her records show only two brothers and a sister, yet the picture shows seventeen persons? The child might see his family from a different perspective and the picture might contain grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins who live nearby and whom he sees often. The closeness of the extended family is made clear in the distinction in the use of terms. In English we refer to "our first cousins" which denotes position in a family tree. In Spanish the term primo carnal doesn't refer to position but rather to those of one blood or flesh.

Perhaps too much has been said about machismo in trying to explain the Mexican-American male; nevertheless, a sensitive teacher will try to learn something about the role of the male child in the Mexican-American home, especially the role of the first born. Reprimanding such a child in front of his classmates might cause a negative reaction toward a female teacher. Consistent conflict in a setting of matriarchal authority, might produce further negative

reactions and disturbances which the teacher might never understand as having been created by her lack of understanding or sensitivity.

Additional examples of the expression of diverse culture need to be generated by those who are concerned with changing teacher behavior. Obviously, knowing about another culture doesn't necessarily produce people who are sensitive to it. However, accurate information and the identification of specific events that can occur in the classroom, and which the teacher must learn to understand, can go a long way as a first step.

Modification of teacher behavior has been treated from two aspects. First, the teacher must seek ways to improve her teaching by learning how to plan for, produce, and evaluate behavior changes in her pupils. Writing instructional objectives in behavioral terms, learning ways to assess the effectiveness of verbal and non-verbal interaction, and understanding the use of positive reinforcement, can all contribute greatly to changes in how the teacher approaches the teaching task. The second aspect is concerned with knowledge about the culture that the Mexican-American child brings to school. It is understood that the knowledge itself will not produce changes in attitudes and expectations about the pupils. However, accurate information which the teacher can use as she observes pupil behavior can often be the key as to whether she will show sensitivity, appreciation, or a positive attitude.

Modification of teacher behavior in these two aspects is a necessity if Mexican-American pupils are to benefit to the fullest from an educational system that has failed them in the past. It is not unreasonable to ask that change take place to make teachers more effective in the classroom and that this effectiveness in pedagogy be enhanced by knowledge of the culture of the Mexican-American.

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